GATT ACTIVITIES IN 1982

Publication of Annual Report on GATT's Work

GATT activities in 1982, published today, is largely focussed on the preparation and results of the Session of the Contracting Parties - the first ministerial-level meeting since the launching of the Tokyo Round in 1973 - which was held at Geneva from 22 to 30 November 1982 with the participation from 24 to 29 November by some 70 ministers from 88 GATT member countries.

Facing a deep and prolonged crisis

The report reflects the situation with which GATT member countries were faced in 1982. As noted in the introduction "deep and prolonged crisis, in the words of the Ministerial declaration issued at the end of that GATT Session, continued to grip the world economy throughout 1982. International trade was again, inevitably, affected: preliminary estimates suggest that in total it was lower both in volume and in dollar terms in 1982 than in the previous year.

In such circumstances, it was only to be expected that trade relations would come under further strain in 1982. This proved to be the case".

In this context, states the report, "it is not easy to sum up the experience of such a year, even from the limited and specialized viewpoint of GATT.

1GATT Activities in 1982 is available in English, French and Spanish editions and may be ordered from booksellers or directly from the GATT Secretariat, Centre William Rappard, 154 rue de Lausanne, 1211 Geneva 21. Price Sw F 12.-.
On the one hand, the major GATT task of putting the results of the Tokyo Round negotiations into practice has continued to go forward. Tariff cuts have been made on schedule, and have now reached the halfway point. Most of the Tokyo Round agreements have now been in force long enough for tentative judgements of their effectiveness to be possible; it seems generally agreed that they are, as was hoped, contributing usefully to the development of trade, even though concerns may remain, in some cases, about areas of uncertain and disputed interpretation. Another positive development in 1982 was the sharp increase in technical cooperation activities aimed at helping developing countries to participate more fully in GATT.

Against these developments, however, must be set an unmistakable deterioration in the climate of trade relations, evident in GATT most clearly in the number of disputes brought to it, but also reflected in the continuing inability to reach agreement on the question of safeguards, and in the difficulties encountered in negotiating the Ministerial declaration of November 1982.

Ministerial Declaration: diagnosis of problems, and political commitments

The report underlines that "discussions in the Ministerial Session were intensive, prolonged and arduous, reflecting the seriousness of the issues and the difficult economic background against which they took place". The outcome was a declaration (reproduced in full in GATT Activities in 1982), adopted by consensus, which "provides a strikingly frank diagnosis of the problems facing international trade policy today. More important, however, it contains a series of political commitments intended to respond to the problems identified, and it sets out detailed decisions to give these commitments effect".

The introduction to the report notes that "final judgement on the significance of the declaration can only be made much later than now, in the light of developments in international trade relations. However, three main conclusions may already be drawn. The Ministerial declaration has reaffirmed the validity of the framework of rules provided for international trade by the General Agreement. It has maintained the basic direction for trade policies set by the GATT. And it has shown that governments continue to subscribe to the proposition that an open and liberal trading system is essential to economic recovery".

The report underlines that "the meeting has helped to create a shared understanding of present trade problems and how they should be tackled. There is no doubt at all that it has provided GATT with a very demanding programme of work for the years immediately ahead".
This additional programme for the 1980s is spelt out in the Declaration and related decisions, each of which concerns one of 17 topics including safeguards, GATT rules and activities relating to developing countries, dispute settlement procedures, trade in agriculture, and others which together make up the central part of the Declaration.

Continuing work programme

The activities of GATT in 1982 were not limited to the Ministerial meeting alone. As the report notes, "the framework for these activities in 1982 continued to be provided by the GATT work programme established late in 1979, at the conclusion of the Tokyo Round of multilateral trade negotiations. Among the principal elements of the 1979 programme were implementation of the Tokyo Round agreements, the question of safeguards, and work directed specifically to helping the trade of developing countries".

These and other tasks undertaken by the committees which administer the Tokyo Round agreements or by other GATT bodies are described in the report. It also comments at some length on the 12 disputes brought before the GATT Council in 1982 which that body referred to panels for examination.